

# United States: White nationalism and White supremacy, Black nationalism and nationalism of oppressed peoples

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## Black Nationalism, Black Solidarity

**In the previous issue of *Against the Current* I discussed the ideology of white nationalism and white supremacy [see below]. The contrasting ideology of Black nationalism must be understood in the framework of the Marxist analysis of nationalism of oppressed peoples.**

Blacks would be happy to drop the hyphenated "African-American" and redefine the term "American" as meaning all of its peoples. Most whites, however, don't support that change if it means seriously coming to grips with the legacy of slavery, genocide and persistent racism.

Even more than 150 years after the Civil War, Confederate monuments still occupy prime property in southern states. "American" and "white," to many, are implicitly equivalent with no hyphen required.

Black "identity politics" is a phrase not commonly used by African Americans. It's a reaction to racism and historical discrimination and oppression, whereas white identity politics is a choice. The terms "white nationalism" and "white supremacy" are interchangeable.

As with previous slogans such as Black Pride or Black Power, the demand Black Lives Matter is one of defiance to police violence. Whenever whites assert their "rights" as Donald Trump did in 2016, African Americans must push back and resist. The power of Black solidarity and nationalism is to strengthen Black unity, and sets an example for others to stand up against the ideology of white victimhood.

The fundamental contrast between Black nationalism and defiance versus white nationalism is important. The former has a positive dynamic; the latter is reactionary.

## **When Race” Trumps” Class**

What Blacks are most concerned about with Trump is his large personal base, who see him as infallible and follow him no matter his flip-flops on issues or his racist rants. That base, including his white working class supporters, see Black defiance as a threat to their leader and themselves.

Although they suffer as all workers do from income inequality and the shift of more wealth to billionaires, they see themselves as victims of immigration and government programs that help Black and Brown people. Trump stokes the worse racial instincts of this base. Race trumps class.

The cult-like worship of Trump is why his working-class supporters continue to back the Republican Party with its Wall Street policies. They believe Trump and his constant lies, even when the facts say otherwise. It is a deep emotional connection.

That mob-like thinking is dangerous for Blacks, Latinos and Muslims. It is how extralegal racist and fascist type organizations are created and used by demagogues.

Trump is conscious of his actions. He manipulates his cult-like white base to get what he wants. The GOP leaders work with Trump because of his base and so long as he signs bills and executive orders that carry out the GOP agenda.

He's appointed far right operatives or billionaires to every Cabinet position. The Attorney General is leading the openly anti-Black campaign. For African Americans it means the continuation of decades of discrimination and violence.

The Justice Department led by Jefferson Sessions has been transformed into a whites-first organization. The Civil Rights division is being turned into a pro-cop and "colorblind" agency. There are no Blacks in senior positions, whereas for eight years under Obama the Attorney General was African American.

## **FBI's New Anti-Black Campaign**

The FBI released a report on August 7, 2017 that came to light in a Congressional hearing in late November with Attorney General Sessions. The report is titled "[Black Identity Extremists Likely Motivated to Target Law Enforcement Officers.](#)"

In his article "The Trump Administration and Hoover-Era Paranoia" in the December 4<sup>th</sup> The New Yorker, Jelani Cobb, a staff writer and professor of journalism at Columbia University, writes:

"The report, which was issued in August and leaked to ForeignPolicy.com last month, argues that the increased scrutiny of police shootings of African-Americans in recent years may result in acts of violence directed at law enforcement. It cites a 2014 incident, in which a man attacked four N.Y.P.D. officers with a hatchet, and a 2016 attack on police in Baton Rouge that left three officers dead. But the primary example is the shooting during an anti-police-brutality rally in Dallas last year, when Micah Xavier Johnson, a twenty-five-year-old Army veteran who harbored resentment toward whites, in general, and toward white law-enforcement officials killed five policemen and wounded seven more, before he himself was killed.

"In discussing such incidents, the report coins the category "black-identity extremist," which is poorly defined but features the three-word rhythm of other usefully ambiguous terms, such as "radical Islamic terrorist." The authors argue that people sympathetic to the Sovereign Citizens

movement and to the Moorish Science Temple of America, both of which reject the authority of the federal government, warrant vigilance, even though violence conducted by any such sympathizers “has been rare over the past twenty years.” To ground their conclusions in history, the authors point to radical organizations of the nineteen-seventies, such as the Black Liberation Army, which has been defunct for longer than Johnson had been alive, and for which they offer scant connection to the B.I.E. cause.

“When Representative Karen Bass, of California, asked Sessions about the report, he said that he had not yet read it but he nonetheless stood by its findings. When she pressed him to cite an organization committed to the kind of violence the report warns of, he said, “There are groups that do have an extraordinary commitment to their racial identity and some have transformed themselves even into violent activists,” but declined to name any.

“The black-identity extremist appears to be something of a bureaucratic phantom, yet that kind can be the most difficult to exorcise. The “Final Report on Negro Subversion” prefaced a long engagement between the F.B.I. and organizations seeking to realize black rights, which included the surveillance of Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as the Bureau’s COINTELPRO efforts to destroy the Black Panther Party. When James Comey was the Bureau’s director, he kept on his desk a copy of the approval of Hoover’s request to wiretap King, as a reminder of the perils of organizational excess.”

Since the end of the Civil War and the defeat of Reconstruction, the government has systematically targeted Black leaders and militants as “subversives,” “communists” and “extremists” while white terrorists who lynched and murder Blacks were often not investigated.

As Cobb notes, the anti-Black actions and policies of government agencies have a long record that continues to this day.

## **The National Question Theory**

The theory behind the “national question,” as Marxists call it, explains national oppression and its progressive dynamics. It is rooted in the basic understanding not only of how capitalism causes class struggle, but also how racism (and previously colonialism) are integral to the ruling class and the economic workings of the system.

Black nationalism, as a nationalism of the oppressed, is powerful. The racial/national oppression of both free Blacks and slaves led Blacks to stand as a people wherever their lives were threatened. The tactics and methods of self-defense and protection were calibrated to the situation. Racial solidarity has been and is inspiring to the Black communities and others.

African Americans have few illusions about racism and national oppression even if they may not use these words to describe Black solidarity. Blacks who have tried to pretend that racism doesn’t impact them because of individual merit quickly learn otherwise. No African American can hide from racist assumptions of whites. Whites don’t know anything about who you are. They just see you’re Black, with all that means to them.

The central reason why the U.S. working class has had a hard time to organizing itself politically and fighting for power is tied to the ruling class ability to use racism, keeping white workers from joining with African Americans on a sustained basis.

In the mid-1800s when Marx wrote Capital and previously the Communist Manifesto, he and

Friedrich Engels saw capitalism as entering its final stages. Marx noted that the fall of capitalism, the victory of socialism and eventually communism would not be easy. The capitalist system on the political level had weapons to use to divide the working class and its allies.

Socialists at the time assumed that colonialism and national oppression would be settled by the class struggle to overthrow the capitalist rulers. But in the imperialist epoch, socialists could no longer view class struggle separately from the rights of colonial peoples and those racially oppressed.

Leon Trotsky's writings in the 1930s on the Black struggle in the United States remain incisive. He explained why the right of self-determination and freedom applied to Black people. In his discussion with leaders of the Socialist Workers Party he said:

"The Negroes are a race and not a nation: —Nations grow out of the racial material under definite conditions ....

"We do, of course, not obligate the Negroes to become a nation; if they are, then that is a question of their consciousness, that is, what they desire and what they strive for. We say: If the Negroes want that then we must fight against imperialism to the last drop of blood, so that they gain the right, wherever and how they please, to separate a piece of land for themselves.

"The fact that they are today not a majority in any state does not matter. It is not a question of the authority of the states but of the Negroes. That in the overwhelming Negro territory also whites have existed and will remain henceforth is not the question and we do not need today to break our heads over a possibility that sometime the whites will be suppressed by the Negroes. In any case the suppression of the Negroes pushes them toward a political and national unity." (See [here](#))

That impulse for unity was the primary reason behind Black support for Obama, more than his views or actions. (Clarence Thomas, a conservative Supreme Court justice, also had majority support from African Americans.)

Voting Black is the lowest form of political consciousness. In 2016 without Obama on the ballot the Black vote went down, and not just because of voter suppression.

The higher form of consciousness arising from popular struggle is a conscious push for radical changes through creating independent (from the two-party system) political organizations. That impetus does not exist — yet.

Although Marx wrote over 170 years ago that capitalism was a destructive system for working people, and Lenin and Trotsky discussed the rights of oppressed peoples, none of these issues have been resolved. Their analysis remains relevant today. Capitalism cannot end racism and bring equality.

## **Malcolm X and Freedom Now**

One hundred years after the rise of Jim Crow segregation, following the defeat of Reconstruction, Malcolm X said the United States did not represent Black people. While still a leader of the Nation of Islam, he said:

"Sir, how can and Negro say America is his nation? He was brought here in chains; he was put in slavery and worked like a mule for three hundred years; he was separated from his land, his culture, his God, his language!

"The Negro was taught to speak the white man's tongue, worship the white God, and accept the white man as his superior.

"This is a white man's country. And the Negro is nothing but an ex-slave who is now trying to get himself integrated into the slave master's house.

"And the slave master doesn't want you! You fought and bled and died in every war the white man waged, and he still won't give you justice. You nursed his baby and cleaned behind his wife, and he still won't give you freedom; you turned the other cheek while he lynched you and raped your women, but he still won't give you equality." (1963)

African American writers such as Ta-Nehisi Coates [1] reflect the realism of average working-class Black Americans. Realism is not pessimism. Like most Blacks, Coates offers no solution to institutional racism.

The nationalism (ethnic solidarity) of oppressed peoples can have a progressive and revolutionary dynamic. Coates himself has radicalized by studying history and the rise of the Movement for Black Lives and actions of Black athletes against police violence. The #MeToo against sexual harassment and assault was first started by African American women ten years ago and is massive today.

The fight for full freedom remains a central one in politics. It can move forward, then be pushed back. Victory requires a state where racial discrimination is not tolerated. (The one country that outlawed institutional racism and used positive action was Cuba under Fidel Castro.)

It is important to study great African American activists and leaders such as Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, W.E.B. DuBois, Ella Baker, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X — but also the Marxist tradition including Marx and Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg and C.L.R. James. The fundamental conflicts of race have evolved. There has been some progress, then reversals. The objective remains what it has always been — Freedom Now through struggle.

**Malik Miah**

\* *Against the Current* n° 192, January-February 2018:

<http://www.solidarity-us.org/site/node/5171>

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## **White Supremacy/Identity Politics**

*"According to Edison Research, Trump won whites making less than \$50,000 by 20 points, whites making \$50,000 to \$99,999 by 28 points, and whites making \$100,000 or more by 14 points. This shows that Trump assembled a broad white coalition that ran the gamut from Joe the Dishwasher to Joe the Plumber to Joe the Banker. So, when white pundits cast the elevation of Trump as the handiwork of an inscrutable white working class, they are being too modest, declining to claim credit for their own economic class. Trump's dominance among whites across class lines is of a piece with his larger dominance across nearly every white demographic. Trump won white women (+9) and white men (+31). He won white people with college degrees (+3) and white people without them (+37). He won whites ages 18-29 (+4), 30-44 (+17), 45-64 (+28), and 65 and older (+19)."*

—Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The First White President. The foundation of Donald Trump’s presidency is the negation of Barack Obama’s legacy” *The Atlantic*, October 2017 [2]

“AMERICA HAS NEVER been great. It’s always been racist,” said protesters in the streets of St. Louis, Missouri. White cop James Stockley planted a gun and claimed fear for his life, after he murdered a young Black man in 2011. The judge issued his acquittal in September 2017.

What happened in St. Louis is so common it is “normal.” It is why Black lives don’t matter to cops and the courts. It is not new. It looks like Detroit 1967.

Resistance to police violence is rising among Blacks and others as social media exposes the truth quicker than ever before. The demands in 1967 and 2017 are the same — Justice and Freedom.

In 1967 Detroit, the National Guard and tanks rolled down the streets of the Black community. Courts and white juries ultimately sided with killer cops committing terror against African Americans.

Today’s federal government and the neo-Confederate Attorney General Jeff Sessions see protesters as breaking “law and order,” and they’re rearming police departments with military hardware.

It poses a simple question: Can cop violence and anti-Black racism be permanently defeated so long as white supremacist ideology permeates the ruling class and society?

## **White Supremacy and Whiteness**

Ta-Nehisi Coates is a prominent African-American intellectual and writer. His article in *The Atlantic* is part of a forthcoming new book soon to be published. Coates’ argument that Donald J. Trump is “the first white president” is jarring and thought-provoking.

Every president until Barack Obama in 2009 has been a white man. Yet Coates’ point that Trump’s election indicates a rejection of the first African-American president (Trump gained political traction with his promotion of the “birther” lies about Obama) is likely valid.

Trump has made it his mission to dismantle every policy that Obama made law by legislation or executive order.

The issue of white supremacy has come to center stage, particularly when Trump declared an equivalence between white supremacists and anti-racists in Charlottesville, Virginia.

The far right and its most racist elements have been emboldened. Trump’s personal bias is not relevant. He uses white identity politics to give momentum to white supremacist supporters. It doesn’t matter if white nationalism is not identical to “economic nationalism,” as Trump’s former national political strategist Steve Bannon claims.

The whiteness issue is real for Black Americans since discrimination based on skin color is the root of what some call “white skin privilege” — where skin color can lead a cop to ask questions of a white person, but to shoot a Black person assuming they represent an inherent “danger.” (A white cop in Georgia told a white woman after a traffic stop that her fear was unfounded since cops only shoot Blacks.)

“Whiteness” is an issue of solidarity and superiority for many, no matter one’s class. Across class lines, white workers like white employers believe that their whiteness is fundamental to their



citizenship. Trump used blatant racism (to woo white supremacists) and white identity politics (attracting white voters of all classes) to win.

## **Whites as “Victims”**

There's an important distinction to be made between white supremacy and white identity. The latter represents a kind of group emotional false consciousness. It includes people who could be won to multi-ethnic and working-class solidarity.

White supremacist ideology today, on the other hand, is more sophisticated than the past when it openly argued for a United States based on whiteness. Immigration policy was designed to keep out nonwhites (e.g. the Chinese exclusion laws). Former slaves were to be denied voting rights and used as cheap labor.

As that model of white America is now unviable in view of changing demographics, today's ideological white supremacists seek (unrealistically) a separate white country. These groups such as neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan are a minority among the milieu of white identity supporters.

These extreme ideologues, however, wield broader influence, like a tail that wags the dog, promoting myths of “white genocide” and victimhood. Trump's base of support comes from a broad layer of whites seeing themselves “victims” of so-called reverse racism and a global economy beyond their control.

Although not supporting the more extreme white supremacist ideology — even backing smart Blacks in high offices if this helps them economically, as many white workers did in voting for Barack Obama — they view a white demagogue like Trump as making their lives better.

Rightwing politicians understand this dynamic, which is why their focus since Obama's first election is to suppress the rights of African Americans, Latinos and Asians. It was amplified by Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell, who said his goal in 2009 was to make Obama a one-term president. He pledged to not work with the first African-American president before he was even sworn into office.

Trump plans to get reelected by using the race card again. He set up a bogus “Electoral Integrity Commission” to look for nonexistent vote fraud and to limit voting. This is what happened in the South after 1877 when the defeated Confederates retook power by organizing white terrorism to take away basic rights from freed slaves.

The white so-called victims of Black civil rights always demand “justice” from the state against Blacks who call out the ideology of white supremacy. The attempts at forcing corporations like ESPN to fire Black female host Jemele Hill, who used her personal Twitter account to call Trump and his circle of friend's white supremacists, is one example.

When Trump called President Obama a foreigner from Africa and an ignorant person who did not get into Ivy League colleges or write his bestselling books — saying a white ghost writer must have done so (as in fact Trump's own *The Art of the Deal* was ghostwritten) — his followers cheered.

The double standard goes back to the founding fathers. Even those who opposed slavery did not see freed Black slaves as equal to whites. President Lincoln raised the idea of having former slaves go back to Africa — where none of them had ever lived — to keep the Union together during the middle of the Civil War.

## **Obama and a New Wave of Racism**

Many socialists during the Jim Crow period believed the best way to end discrimination was to argue for a class approach (focused on “bread and butter” issues) and not to take on the racism of white union leaders and white workers. It is why segregated union locals could exist in the South.

When Obama was first elected president in 2008 many thought a “nonracial” era was beginning. Even liberals generally accepted this false reasoning.

No one believes that now. The parallel that Ta-Nehisi Coates suggests is that it feels more like the end of the Reconstruction era, when the defeated Southern rulers asserted themselves after Union troops were withdrawn. They took back total power, and those Blacks elected to office and running state governments were pushed back to third-class citizenship.

The irony is that the U.S. Constitution had given white property owners extra votes by counting slaves as three-fifths of a human being. After Reconstruction was crushed, Blacks were “free” citizens but without voting rights, yet each counted as a full-person vote for the southern states’ representation in Washington.

The lesson for today is to learn that history, and fight the new white supremacists and their enablers like Trump at every turn. A repeat of history is not inevitable. The country could be a majority nonwhite by 2050. But political and economic power could still be primarily white.

The white power structures will never give up their control without a revolution. To resist and defeat the racists — both active and complicit by silence — it’s necessary to understand how history can indeed repeat itself. Even if it would be different from the first time, the outcomes can be worse. The first Black president could be the last one under the original Constitution.

In 1776 the founders were white men who assumed a new war would occur if the southern rulers did not give up slaves freely. They had expected it would happen as it did in England and its colonies in the 1830s.

The Southern slave owners made clear that it was their wealth. Slaves would never be freed peacefully. It’s why the Civil War was so bloody and violent, and inevitable. And it’s why as Karl Marx explained at the outset of the war, the North would win with its not so secret weapon — freed slaves turning on their former masters.

## **A Second Civil War?**

The clear majority will have to recognize reactionary forces for what they are and take whatever necessary actions to stop them.

The African-American columnist of The New York Times, Charles Blow, wrote in the September 18, 2017 issue, “Is Trump a white supremacist?”

How can you take comfort among and make common cause with white supremacists and not assimilate to their sensibilities?

I say that it can’t be done. If you are not completely opposed to white supremacy, you are quietly supporting it. If you continue to draw equivalencies between white supremacists and the people who oppose them — as Trump did once again last week — you have crossed the racial Rubicon and



moved beyond quiet support to vocal support. You have made an allegiance and dug a trench in the war of racial hostilities.

Either Trump is himself a white supremacist or he is a fan and defender of white supremacists, and I quite honestly am unable to separate the two designations.

The Trump legacy may quicken the social conflicts and struggle for full equality and freedom. Is a new civil war likely the only way to create a genuine nonracial country that the Obama illusion could only pretend to bring?

**Malik Miah**

\* *Against the Current* n°191, November-December 2017:

<http://www.solidarity-us.org/site/node/5119>

## Footnotes

[1] Ta-Nehisi Paul Coates is an American author, journalist, comic book writer, and educator. Coates is a national correspondent for The Atlantic, where he writes about cultural, social and political issues, particularly regarding African Americans – Ed

[2] <http://theatlntc/2eJOTeb>